

Ladies and Gentlemen. The U.S. Helsinki Commission is pleased to welcome you to this briefing on recent developments in Serbia. My name is Donald Kursch and I am serving as the Senior Advisor to the Commission. This morning we wish to give particular attention to the question of Serbia's cooperation with the international community in prosecuting war crimes. We also would like to review the prospects for democratic development and human rights in Serbia now that the state of emergency imposed following the assassination of Prime Minister Djindjic has been lifted.

In less than two weeks the U.S. Government will need to determine whether the efforts by the Government of Serbia and Montenegro have met the legal requirements necessary for certain U.S. bilateral assistance programs to continue. Three conditions have been placed on this assistance, but of these conditions cooperation with the International War Crimes Tribunal continues to be of primary concern to the members of our Commission. We certainly have welcomed the tough measures that the authorities in Belgrade have taken in the wake of Mr. Djindjic's murder to crack down on the criminal elements which have continued to be a barrier to Serbia and Montenegro's full integration into the institutions of our Euro-Atlantic Community. Friends and well-wishers of Serbia and Montenegro, of whom I would count myself as one, very much want to do all that we can to encourage these courageous actions and insure that they are continued. This momentum must not be lost if a lasting foundation for democracy and a functioning market economy is to be firmly established. Indeed, the tragedy of this past March may have offered us a special opportunity to deal with the heavy legacy of the past.

In this process we recognize that decisions will be difficult and sometimes unpopular. Bold action by Serbia's leaders will be critical. However, I would hope we might agree that the progress already made by the democratic forces in Belgrade in overcoming the estrangement between Serbia and the West of the Milosevic years has been great enough that there is no real option other than to keep moving forward.

We are most pleased to have four distinguished experts to enlighten us with their views. We are particularly honored to welcome Amb. Ivan Vujacic, the Ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro to the United States who has the challenging but promising task of being both a major architect and builder of what we hope will be a close and productive partnership between his country and the United States. We are also very pleased to have Nina Bang-Jensen, of the Coalition for International Justice, Elizabeth Andersen of Human Rights Watch and James Fisfis of the International Republican Institute. Ms. Bang-Jensen will be giving particular attention to Serbia's level of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal. Ms. Andersen will be discussing progress on human rights and democracy, with special focus of the development of the judicial system. Mr. Fisfis, who is currently working in Serbia, will provide valuable insights into trends in Serbian public opinion. Amb. Vujacic will conclude by providing his government's perspective on recent developments.

I would ask that all participants please limit their presentations to less than ten minutes so that we have time for questions and discussion. Of course, we will be very pleased to insert the complete versions of their statements in the record of this session that we will publish in full. For additional information relating to the subject of today's briefing I would also call your attention to the Commission's website www.csce.gov.